

The Life
Of
Hans Peter Neilson
From Denmark to Arizona

“A Real Cowboy”

Compiled by
Dona Lucile Johnson Cooper
2011

Preface

It seems that for as long as I can remember there has always been a mystical mystery surrounding our Great grandfather Hans Peter Neilson. Not so much a skeleton in our family history, but a person who was very independent and not much family oriented; and we hated to admit it, but he was on the wild cowboy side. Actually, perhaps we thought it was pretty neat to have an exciting character like him in our family. An ancestor with an adventurous spirit. How many ancestor's run off and live with the Indians? A lot of the truth was never known and a lot of tales and half truth tales were made up concerning him.

It was interesting to me to see how one man's actions could influence many future generations to come. It was with curiosity that I decided to strike out and fine out as much as I could about our grand ancestor.

As you will find when reading that there isn't a whole lot to go by. I therefore had to speculate in many places and give my own opinion. The history of the different areas he lived is included to help expand how life was for him at that time. It could stand for a lot more research. More information is coming forward all the time and perhaps in the future another curious progenitor will give it another go and make a better story and give more accurate information than I have been able to do.

What I hope will happen to who takes the time to read this paper is that they will reflect upon what a tremendous influence we have on our children and they in turn influence their own children on down, etc. Many choices were made for Hans Peter and at the time were thought to be the best thing for him. It didn't turn out to be best for him. So how much sympathy do we give him and how much responsibility will he eventually have to take upon himself for the choices he made. We all in our own lives have to do the same eventually.

Please excuse the writer putting so much of her own opinion into this story. It is believed that this short story will finally help us all know our Great Grandfather a little better and to lend him a little more understanding. He's still the exciting person he was before I started my research and maybe more so.

Thank you, Ivan Johnson, for all the great photos and helping me to track the actual places Hans worked and lived in. Thank you Jennifer Johnson, you've been a great support to me in all aspects of my life.

Dona Lucile Johnson Cooper



Hans Peter Neilson

Hans Peter Neilson

Hans Peter Sorenson/Neilson/Nielsen

Hans Peter Sorenson-Elder-son of Jens (Sorenson) Nielsen and Elsie Marie Petersen, born in Lyngaa, Aarhus, Denmark. Born on 10 April 1867.

No Dane lives more than 35 miles from the sea or, for that matter, more than 568 feet above it. Endlessly honed and leveled by a succession of Ice Age glaciers, Denmark has inspired neighboring Norwegians, with their wealth of mountains, to twit the Danes with the comment: If you stand on a box you can see the whole country. Ignoring the taunt, some 5,100,000 Danes refer to their homeland with equal poetry and pride as "Denmark"--literally, "Field of the Danes."

In the early 1800s, Aarhus was the third largest city in Denmark, but later became the second largest city in Denmark behind Copenhagen. The population of Aarhus in 1860 was 11,000; in 1870 was 15,025; and in 1901 was 51,814. The city is located on a bay of the Cattagat on the east coast of Jutland.

Hans Peter was not christened in a parish because his parents were Mormons. He was blessed and given a name in the Danish Branch. On all Danish Parish records the family is recorded as Nielsen. On all Danish L.D.S. records the family is Sorensen. Later when the family had all arrived in Utah, some members of the family changed their names back to "Nielsen". It's very confusing, but there are documented records that identify each member of this family and what name they finally went by.

Upon talking with a professional consultant at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, it was learned why the "Sorensen/Nielsen" family acted as they did and sent our great grandfather off by himself to America.

People living in Denmark were very poor and living conditions were extremely bad. It surprised me to learn that our Jens and Elsie Marie's first child was born out of wedlock. But, at that time couples wanting to marry and have a family were so poor they had no money and no possessions to even live together as man and wife. They just got together and I guess moved in with his or her parents. Jens was a stonecutter.

Memories of Denmark for Hans were of being very poor. His father was a stone mason and made small wages. One night he and his brother went to bed hungry. They got up in the middle of the night and went into the kitchen for food, but all they could find was one hard dry piece of bread and bacon grease. They put the grease on the bread and started to eat it when they were interrupted by their mother, who gave them a licking and made them put it up, as it was all they had for their breakfast.

As their children came along (the first three or four), they planned to go to America with the LDS saints. They were all members of the Church. But the family did not have enough money to come to America together. As with other families in the same circumstances, these Saints felt it was better for the children to send them out alone rather than risk early death in Denmark living in horrible destitute conditions. They felt that the children would have a better chance of a good life in American. For some of the children sent over like this it worked out and they did have a good healthy life in America, but for the majority, they were treated badly and the effect of separation from their families was horrendous and caused a lifetime of problems.



Old Aarhus



Aarhus



Old Aarhus

Some Saints sent their children by two's, either the two oldest or the two youngest children or, as in our case a single young child. Hans Peter our great grandfather, was sent alone at the age of only four. He came with returning missionaries to Salt Lake City. It is claimed the missionary was a cousin. This hasn't been proven, but is believed to have been a cousin of his mother's.

At this point it seems natural to find out why the Nielsen's emigrated. A research thesis was written and stored at the BYU Harold B. Lee Library that goes into great depth on the Danish movement. It was found to be very informative and answered so many questions as to why Hans Peter was sent before the rest of his family to America. Although it seemed logical at the time, it turned out to be a very trying life, not only on our g-g-grandfather, but on the generations that followed. Though it is a bit long it is very important to his life and that of his parents. So I include a part of it that pertains to our family. Starting on page 107.

"....To many of these early converts, "The gathering was regarded as a "sign of one's faithfulness, and the convert who did not feel the pull was considered a queer dish in the gospel net. There was, then, universal yearning, on the part of the faithful converts, to gather to Zion.

Once migration had commenced, local and world conditions had a visible effect upon the emigration movement....

Another influence upon Danish immigration was the local economical conditions which offered very few opportunities for advancement. This local condition caused many to long for distant utopias. By the turn of the 20th Century the economic conditions improved resulting in a lessening in the old desire to emigrate.....

.....The Danish Saints had to first find their way to Copenhagen, the main assembly point. For those living on the peninsula of Jutland or one of the many islands which made up Denmark, this meant a crossing of the straits by boat to Copenhagen. These were short but adventurous to many who, for the first time in their lives were seeing other parts of the country. Subsidiary assembly points were set up along the east coast of Jutland at Aalborg, Aarhus, and Fredericia. When groups were large enough at these points, they were taken directly to Kiel or Lubeck on the German portion of the peninsula instead of Copenhagen. Here they were joined by those who had assembled in Copenhagen. The journey then continued by rail to Altona, a small town on the Elbe River near Hamburg, or to Gluckstadt, also on the Elbe River down from Altona. With the exception of the years 1862, 1865, and 1866, when those who emigrated sailed directly from Hamburg to America, the emigrants sailed across the North Sea to Grimsby or Hull in England and then took the train to Liverpool. The North Sea has a reputation for being a rough body of water, and for many this crossing was the worst part of the whole trip. From Liverpool the Saints set sail across the Atlantic for America.....

....Due to the fact that most of the early emigrants had traveled no further from their homes than the nearest market town, instructions had to be given which would encompass every detail of preparation and departure. For this information the emigrants would look to the mission periodical, Skandinaviens Stjerne, which soon became the official emigrant guide. The "Scandinavian Mission History" in quoting from the Skandinaviens Stjerne of January 1, 1859, gives an example of the kind of information published to aid the Saints.

...The cost for each adult who intended to cross the plains with handcarts would be about 150 Ragsdale (\$75.00) and that those who would cross with oxen and wagons would need about 200 rigsdaller (\$100) if eight persons were reckoned to each wagon. Those who expected to emigrate under those terms were advised to send their names with age, date and place of birth, occupation, et., to their respective conference presidents and at the same time advance 40 Ragsdale (\$20) for each handcart emigrant and 80 Ragsdale (\$40) for each wagon emigrant. This money would be sent to America in advance to purchase the necessary equipment for the journey across the plains,, such as handcarts, wagons, oxen and provisions.

In addition to the help given through the Skandinaviens Stjerne, The presiding elder of each district “became a faithful shepherd, guiding them through the legal maze of obtaining passports, assisting in the disposal of goods, and even lending to the task of packing.”

In 1867 the steamships succeeded the sailing vessels. In June of that year the first company of Scandinavian emigrants crossed the Atlantic Ocean by steam, and in July 1869, the first Scandinavian company of emigrants made the entire overland journey by rail. As a result of these advancements, the total travel time was cut to 27 days with the hardships and hazards which had accompanied early emigrants practically eliminated. Even with these advanced means of travel, however, the emigrant-Saints still maintained their identity as a traveling community by berthing apart from other emigrants and continuing to conduct their devotionals, dances, and other activities as before.

.....Economically these operations were conducted on a cooperative basis where the emigrants pooled their meager resources into an “Emigration Fund” held by the Church emigration agents in Copenhagen. In doing this they were able to obtain some degree of bargaining power. According to Dr. Mulder this also “meant cheaper travel for those who could pay their own way, and it created a carrier for those who could not.”

Dr. Mulder further pointed out that “the heart of the system” which pumped the badly needed credit into the Scandinavian Emigration Fund, was called the Perpetual Emigration Fund. This early fund was first set up in Salt Lake City for the purpose of giving immediate relief to the poor Saints gathered on the Pottawattamie lands of Iowa. But it was also clearly intended to extend “its helping hand” to the “poor Saints” of Europe, and this it did.

.....In addition to the aid given through the Perpetual Emigration Fund, the Scandinavian Saints in Utah contributed twenty-five cents a month to a local “emigrant aid society” for the purpose of helping their fellow-countrymen to Zion. In the Danish town of Copenhagen, which by 1872 expected to have an emigrant fund of about \$2000, held an additional benefit sponsored by the local sisters. Sarah Annn Peterson of the Women’s Relief Society urged all her sisters to donate all Sunday eggs to the fund, and other settlements soon followed suit. It was reported that “it looked as if the chickens entered into the spirit of the things for they seemed to lay more eggs on Sunday than any other day in the week!” This generosity from Zion was matched by thrift and enterprise in the mission. After 1860 most of the tithing went to the emigration of the poor. Besides the above, mission-wide savings plans were inaugurated. A regular savings system was set

up in a bank significantly called Bikuben (Beehive), (Utah State emblem).

Yet with all of these preparations it took some people many years to save enough for their passage. Had it not been for the use of cheap handcarts in the late 1800's and the practice during the 1860's of sending out wagons from Mormon settlements in the Territory to meet the emigrants at the advancing railroad terminal, hundreds would have come to a temporary but disappointing journey's end from lack of means to cross the plains. In writing of the poor Scandinavian Saints, who for many years had longed for their "deliverance" without being able to save enough to make such a trip,

Mission leaders from time to time tried to point out the importance of being thrifter in handling finances. Saints were encouraged to regularly set aside some of their earnings:

Instead of using your 10 orer (21/2 cent) and 25 orer (6 1/2 cents), and often larger amounts, unwisely--something that we have often seen--we will counsel you to save all of your small coins for your emigration. The person who will set aside 10 orer daily will (if one figures 300 working days a year) save within ten years 300 kroner (\$75), or the amount needed for the journey. If one saves 20 ore (5 cent) a day the result would be reached in five years, and if one laid aside 25 ore each day the same result could be reached in four years. If everyone did this, it wouldn't be necessary for so many of our brethren and sisters to be left behind year after year.

For many this was a slow, painful savings, and in many respects represents a people attempting to lift themselves by their own bootstraps. Great was their success!

.....The end of 1900, saw 12,345 Danish Saints leave the old country to settle in or around Utah. It was reported by historians that the Danish emigrants of the Mormon Church tended to settle in Sanpete Valley, but a few--mostly craftsmen--remained in the capital. As time went on, the stream of immigration flowed toward Sevier and Sanpete Counties south of Salt Lake City, toward Box Elder and Cache Counties in the north, and to centrally located Salt Lake County. Scandinavians also overflowed into Idaho and Nevada in the 1860's; To Wyoming, Arizona, Colorado, and New MexicoCanada and Mexico.....many of the Danish emigrants had much to do with the settling of Manti, Springtown (once called Little Denmark), Gunnison, Moroni, Mt. Pleasant, and Fairview....."

Hans came over with a missionary cousin and they went to Fort Ephraim, Sanpete, Utah.

"Upon arriving in Salt Lake City, the Scandinavian saints were directed to various Mormon settlements, such as Brigham City and the Cache Valley, but most eventually ended up in Sanpete County.

.....word about the Sanpete Valley being a gathering place got out among Scandinavians arriving in Utah, and in time Ephraim became the location with the greatest concentration of Scandinavian newcomers. (By 1870, nearly 95 percent of Ephraim's population was of Scandinavian descent, although several settlers left Ephraim to establish other communities in the valley as well.)....." Scandinavian Heritage Festival, <http://www.scandinavianheritagefestival.com>

Actual Immigration record for Hans states: Name: Hans Sorensen, Year embarked 1873, estimated birth about 1869, Place of arrival: New York, NY, departed from Copenhagen. Source of information: Anderson, Shauna C. "Passport to Paradise, The Copenhagen Mormon Passenger Lists", Volume One 1872-1887, West Jordan, UT.



Elsie Marie Peterson



Jens Nielsen/Sorensen

Hans told his son Les that he remembered the voyage to American in a sailing vessel even though he was so little. He describes a great storm and how all the passengers were crowded into the cabin for a long period of time clinging to each other. He remembers the horse-drawn street cars in New York City.

His parents really did a courageous thing. Believing their child would be better off by sending him to live with strangers to a foreign land and exercising faith that they would take care of him; that sometime in the future they could join him and be together as a family once more in a better land. For Hans it didn't work out that way. It was disaster. He lost contact with the family for years, was alone, and basically treated as a slave until he was twelve. The family never heard from him when he got to Utah. They thought he was dead and they even named another child after him

Hans was boarded out with families in the community of Ephraim. In the 1880 census of Ephraim, he is shown as a boarder living in the Niels Clemensen household, who were an older couple. There were other elderly people living in the same house. He was going to school and was age 10 according to the census, but his birth date was stated, abt. 1870.

At about 1880, he was tired of what was happening to him in Ephraim. He was parentless, passed from home to home and used as a servant. He was really an orphan. He was actually about twelve when he ran away to Arizona.

Notes from a granddaughter of Hans Peter Sorenson/Neilson's parents, Elsie Marie Oliver, Price, Utah:

"Called Little Hans. Hans Peter came to this country with a missionary. Went to Sanpete County. His family lost all track of him for many, many years and so named no. 8 child Hans Peter also. He and his family were reunited. He married Mary Evaline Smithson in Woodruff, AZ.....

We have two birth dates for Hans. The LDS Church records show him baptized in Utah and his birthday was 10 April 1867. Another record shows it to be 8 May 1868. Does it really matter?"

History of Hans Peter Neilson as told by Les Neilson, son of Hans Peter, to Betty Lou Neilson:

"Grandfather Neilson came from Denmark when a small boy. He left Copenhagen, Denmark by boat with his cousin who was on a mission for the Church. His name was Jana Jenson.

He lived with his relatives in Fort Ephraim, Utah. He was about four years old when he left Denmark. He lived in Fort Ephraim for about two years. One day he saw a chicken buyer with a wagon and found out he was going to Dixie, Utah. He hid in back of wagon for two days. He stayed around Dixie, the old chicken man was going to take him back home, but he ran away and met up with some cowboys, they took him to Lee's Ferry on the Colorado River. Grandfather lived with John D. Lee at Lee's Ferry for about a year. Then he went out to the Hopi's Reservation and lived with the Indians there. Moenkopi, Hopi Indian village. He lived with them until he was about 21. Jacob Hamblin, a Mormon missionary to the Indians, found Grandfather in the years 1877 or 1878. Jacob Hamblin took Grandfather to live with the Rhode Willis and other families in Sunset, an old Mormon settlement between Flagstaff and Winslow, across river from Lupe, Arizona. He didn't approve what went on at this settlement so went down to Winslow and

worked for the Hash Knife Cattle Company for several years. He also worked for other cattlemen around area. Then he started working for Jim D. Smithson (our great grandfather). He worked with his cattle. He met Bro. Smithson's daughter, Mary Evelyn (our great grandmother) and they courted. She lived in Woodruff, Arizona with her father and mother. They went together for about three years. They were married in Woodruff, Arizona, by the Bishop of the L.D.S. Church."

He told his daughter, Ada Pearl, that Billy the Kid rode into his camp and spent the night with him. His family was convinced that he wasn't afraid of anything."

You can see some of that information is incorrect, it did give lots of leads for research and interesting things were found.

Lot Smith-Sunset, Arizona, United Order

Lot Smith only gave our great-grandfather Hans Peter grief and thus he ran off and lived with the Indian's. We also heard that Lot Smith brought him over from Denmark. All pretty much wrong. The truth probably is that our Grandfather was already wild, young, and had been on his own for many years already when he met up with Lot Smith. It is believed that Lot probably tried to give him a good home and place to grow up in, but Hans having no family or anyone that really cared if he was alive or dead went on his merry way to keep himself alive. He found refuge with the Indians an odd answer to his problems. But, grateful we are that they did take him in and feed him. Although in the end it hurt him in his future family relationships. He didn't know how to relate and take the responsibility of a family on permanently. Grandma Evelyn was a great lady to have put up with all she did in her married life.

Back to Lot Smith. Here is an excerpt from a book. It shows a good side to Lot Smith. Of all the bad we hear about him, this is a breath of fresh air.

"My first acquaintance with Lot Smith was in the spring of 1880 when he came to Kanab with Apostle Wilford Woodruff after the latter's year of missionary work in Arizona. By Brother Smith's request I let him take my best team to take Brother Woodruff to St. George. It was only a few weeks after this that my call to Arizona came, instructing me to meet Apostle Erastus Snow at Kanab Stake Conference to be held at Glendale in June, where Brother Snow would set me apart for my mission. My next meeting with Lot was at Sunset, Arizona, the home of this unusual man and his United Order colony. We were on our way to St. Johns and he took us in and treated us with great kindness. On reaching St. Johns I soon learned that President Lot Smith had been a good friend to the colony of poor--yea, destitute saints. Having nothing better to offer during the summer of 1880 he furnished the people in St. Johns with barley, which they ground in coffee - mills and made into coarse bread. This helped them to live until their men folks, who were working away....."



He really was the wild cowboy as pictured here.

Aztec Land and Cattle Company, “Hash Knife Ranch”

“In the early days, the whole country around Northern Arizona was covered with a lot of wild grass and was a desirable place to raise cattle. The great abundance of grass, growing belly high to a horse at that time, was probably one of the things that attracted the first colonizers.

As an inducement for them to build their railroad through Northern Arizona, the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad Company (later renamed the Santa Fe) was given a grant of every alternate section of land along the railroad bed, alternate sections owned by the government. This made a strip of land 40 miles wide and 100 miles wide and 100 miles long, extending from near Flagstaff to 12 miles east, of Holbrook. This checker board ownership of property still exist today.

In Texas, the range had become crowded, so it became necessary to look for newer and larger range. The railroad, with this big strip of lush grassland, and the Aztec Land and Cattle Company, who were hungry for more range for their large herds, soon got together. Some sort of agreement was made, between the two companies that were advantageous to them both. So in 1885, sixty thousand cattle and two thousand horses were shipped out of Texas into Northern Arizona.

This tremendous amount of cattle badly over-stocked the range and the grass was soon depleted. There were no fences, in those days, so the cattle soon ranged far beyond the holdings of the railroad company.

The pioneers had brought a few milk cows, work horses and range cattle with them, so the grass growing on the range around the town of Woodruff was needed for their livestock. The invading herds soon began coming right into town, eating gardens, trees and anything else that was edible..... Thus causing problems with the farmers and the problem with the sheep intensified problems in north central Arizona.” “Woodruff, The Butte-iful Garden Spot of the West”, by Morjorie G. Luper



Hunt, Arizona

This photo was taken within a couple of miles north of the Greer Ranch just out of St. John. This is the house and property of John Hunt. Now run down and abandoned. At one time it was a very beautiful home.



The Hunt Home



Greer Ranch had huge corals and artesian wells. Although, this is at Hunt, it is so much like the Greer Ranch it is included to show the land area.



Hunt Ranch



Hunt Ranch. In the background is a distant ridge which at the base runs the Little Colorado River. The Greer Ranch covered thousands of acres and up to the River.

Greer Valley and the Mexicans and being a cowboy

Hunt is an agricultural settlement seventeen miles down the stream from St. Johns and one mile below a former Mexican settlement, near San Antonio, above which at some time subsequent to 1876 there settled an army officer named Hunt, who left the service at Fort Apache and whose descendants live in the county. The first Mormon settler was Thomas L. Greer. In 1879, the old Greer Ranch was still maintained, a mile east of the present post office. Thereafter, the location was known as Greer Valley.

The Meadows purchase, eight miles northwest of St. Johns, was occupied November 28, 1879. Among the settlers was the famous Indian missionary, Ira Hatch. He was authorized to purchase the Meadows at the same time the Church bought St. John's.

The general subject of land titles in the Mormon settlements that came within the scope of railroad land grants had been an issue for some years. In St. Johns there was added need for defense of the squatter titles secured from Barth and the Mexicans, while there was assault on the validity of the occupation of the town site. On several occasions, especially in March, 1884, there was an attempted "jumping" of the choicest lots and there was near approach to bloodshed, prevented only by the specific determination of Bishop Udall. The opposition upset a house that had been placed upon one lot and riotous conditions prevailed for hours. Reinforcements quickly came from outlying Mormon settlements and firearms were carried generally in self defense. A number of lawsuits had to be defended, at large expense. There was friction with the Mexican element, which

lived compactly in the old town, just east of the Mormon settlement, and clashes were known with a non-Mormon American element that had political connections with the Mexicans.

Hans claimed to be involved in the Cattlemen and Sheep men wars probably participating in the raiding of Mexican sheep camps. That is where he probably got his horse shot out from underneath him. See his obituary for some interesting reading.

Article taken from ARIZONA HIGHWAYS, February 1995, page 34:

“The St. Johns gun battle was not the first and far from the last, confrontation of Hispanic sheep men and Anglo cattlemen in Apache county during the bloody 1880s.

Lorenzo Hubbell, the famed Indian trader, was sheriff of the county at the time of the San Juan’s Day shoot-out. In a later memoir written for “The Sheriff” magazine, Hubbell declared that “I’d scarcely been elected sheriff before a war broke out between the sheep and cattle men all over this section of the territory. The cattle men were Texans and they opened bloody warfare; upon all the poor, ignorant Mexicans, Indians and Spanish-Americans who owned the sheep.”.....

.....”I settled the war, but it cost the lives of nearly 300 men, including five of my deputies. The sheep and cattle men shot it out with each other, and some 295 were killed.”

No documentation exists to verify the number of casualties in the bitter struggle of more than a decade, but no other participant or historian has estimated losses even approaching 300. Some Greer family members believe as many as 50 lost their lives before an uneasy peace was restored.”

Hans Peter’s parents arrive in Utah

Jens and Elsie settled in Emery County when they finally got to America around 1882. A lot of research has been done, but information on their actual trip over from Denmark hasn’t been found yet. No documented records of their arrival. If one did go into the archives of Utah it probably could be found, but this researcher was limited on that ability to do so. A grandson of Jens and Elsie Marie did some research on the family after their arrival. Basically, the family moved from place to place and house to house and job to job around Spanish Fork, Payson and in the coal mining area of Castle Gate. Usually they moved on when out of money and had no job and the rent monies ran out. Jens died in early 1890s and most of the male children seemed to be shiftless and have no real direction in life.

When Hans did connect up with them years later, the Utah family tradition says, that they hated to see him come as he only ask for handouts or to borrow money. They never really were close and lost track of each other over the years again. They were all strangers to each other and had totally different ways of life.

Mary Evelyne Smithson

Born: 26 January 1873

Place: Kanosh, Willard, Utah, USA

Death: 7 Sept 1926

Place: Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Mary Evelyne Smithson our grand grandmother comes into our scene about this time. I must admit that she and her line of Smithson's have always been a mystery to me. Even though a lot of these old uncles and aunts and older cousins were still alive on all of our lines, we never met them or maybe we were just little kids and it didn't mean anything to us then. It does now. That's life I guess. It's sad, but I probably got to know them better after they were gone and I was an adult then if they were alive.

Mary Evelyne Smithson lived most of her girlhood in Woodruff, Arizona, about twelve miles from Holbrook. Her childhood took place in an uncivilized area of eastern Arizona. Indians, outlaws, Mexicans, rough cattle companies and the list goes on.

She told one incident when their family of small children were going on a trip in a covered wagon. A small band of Apache Indians came upon them and it was the quick thinking of her older sister, Saline, that saved them. They quickly dabbed spots on their faces to appear as if they had the dreaded disease small pox, this being much feared by the Indians at that time.

Another time she and an older sister, with the younger children in the family, were alone at the old log house in Woodruff, and a large band of Indians rode up, intent on stealing livestock or doing some plunder. She went to the leader and told him that her father was their friend. That they could negotiate a deal later if they would come to the house; and sit on the porch where they would be served food. When they did come, Mary Evelyne served them biscuits with molasses on tin plates. The Indians went away and no one was molested and no live stock lost.

Mary sold eggs and produce to help feed her children. She later became a public dressmaker. Many times she worked from sunup till sundown after all were asleep doing sewing or some kind of handwork. It wasn't uncommon for her to sit-up with a sick child or to help a mid-wife deliver babies.

One of the greatest events remembered by her daughter, Pearl, took place in Phoenix. Mary took two little Negro children into their home, because their mother had left them. The father had been injured. She kept them two months until the county put them in a home. While they were there, she was criticized by her neighbors.

When Hans saw Mary Evelyne Smithson at a sweet 16 year old, at a Church dance, his heart was turned. She was living in Woodruff, Arizona. This was during the time when plural marriages were still practiced. An older man of the Church was trying to court her and he already had two other wives (so the story goes.). Hans told him to leave her alone when he started his courting with Mary Evelyne. Once while riding his horse down the street, he found this gentlemen trying to engage her in conversation. Without hesitation, he hit him with his quirt and told him it would be worse the next time.

Mary Evelyne was a beautiful girl and he very probably made a romantic figure of a cowboy. She was from a strong Church family and he, while a Church member, had not had much Church training or experience and did not participate in it very much, except in a

social way. They were married on 9th November 1889, in Woodruff. What a combination that made. It truly looks like he tried to turn his life around and even started attending Church. But, his long habits sucked him in again and he wasn't able to hang on long.

Marriage to Mary Evelyne Smithson

Marriage Certificate: This certifies that on the Ninth day of November A.D. 1889, Hans Neilson and Evaline Smithson were married according to the law and statutes of Arizona made and provided for said ceremonies by James Deans, Justice of the Peace, Woodruff Precinct in the county Arizona Territory.

Hans Neilson

Evaline Smithson

Where as we hand this ninth day of November 1889

Married by Bishop Savage, but the marriage certificate say by the J. P. May have been married by both.

Church Records

The following Church records show that the family were leaving the Ward to move to Utah.

Hans Peter Sorenson-Elder-son of Jens Sorenson and born in Lyngaa, Aarhus, Denmark. Born on 10 April 1867. Baptized in Utah. Ordained an Elder in Snowflake in October of 1891 by J. N. Smith. Re-baptized in Woodruff, Arizona on 15 Oct 1891.

Removed March 3, 1893 to Utah

Received in Castle Gate, Utah

Hans wife and children were with him on this move to Castle Gate, Utah, but they didn't stay very long. He never got along with his Utah family. Tradition tells us that they did not ever like to see him come, because he was always there looking for a handout or to borrow something. The Utah family was always a mystery to Hans' family; Never inter-mingling.



Left to right: Bertha, Albert, James holding Pearl, Evelyne and Les

**1900 Census - Graham County, Territory of Arizona, Precinct No. 13,
6 July 1900**

Hans was off working in Morenci, Graham County, Arizona. Census shows him as a hired hand, born Jan, 1868, age 32, single, Denmark, immigrated 1873, 27 years in USA, Teamster

Mary Evelyne was with the children in the Territory of Arizona, Graham County, Precinct No. 13, 6 July 1900

Mary, head of house, born 1873, age 27, married for 10 years, five children, five children living, born in Utah, father born in Iowa, mother born in Iowa.

James, son, July 1890, age 9 single, born in Arizona

Lizzie daughter, Oct 1892, age 7 single, born in Arizona

Bertha, age 6, born Feb. 1894, born in Arizona

Leslie, age 3, June 1896, born in Arizona

Albert, age 4 months, Jan. 1900, born in Arizona

Mary was living in Duncan with the children, not so far from Morenci. Hans was a hired hand and freighting.

Morenci in 1910 had a population of only 5,000, and was doomed to extinction. Of course, the Neilson's were gone, but here is an idea how things were like to live there in that era. Aunt Pearl told that they never lived around where there were LDS Church meetings. So they went to whatever religion was holding meetings in the area. Thus her religion was a mix of many different doctrines. It was hard for her to hang on and accept and totally understand Mormonism. I doubt that there were any services in Morenci, Duncan, Ashfork, Middle Verde.

"At an altitude of 4,836 feet, the layout of the original town site was almost impassible. Built against the sides of Longfellow Hill, the vertical alignment of building construction gained the town the distinction as one of the most dangerous in the United States. Far and near it came to be known as the town without a wheeled vehicle. As late as 1912 the deliveries to homes by shopkeepers were made by pack burro and ladder, since there were no roads to walk from point on, is said that small children were tethered in the yards of their homes while playing, to keep them from falling below. Sometime during 1912 the burro paths were widened by blasting to make it possible to bring a vehicle-even an automobile-into town." Taken from a Greenlee County History article.

Duncan, lying three miles from the border of New Mexico in the extreme southeastern corner of Greenlee County. It is in the fertile Gila River Valley where every acre was cultivated. It was a perfect farming and marketing area. The farmers sold their goods to the mines in and near Morenci and shipped it out further east. They lived in Duncan for sometime where there were many relatives on the Smithson side of the family.

Mary Evelynne and their son, Jim, were good truck farmers and they kept the family going with the produce they sold. They did this in Middle Verde.

1910 Census Ash Fork, Yavapai, Territory of Arizona, 9 May 1910

The census of 1910 in Ash Fork shows the family altogether. Hans was working as a stockman. But, in a few months of that same census they were living in Graham County, and Hans was doing odd jobs. James was already earning money for the family as head of the house.

Bertha Neilson Palmer, daughter, died leaving small children. She died during the great flu epidemic of 1917-18.

Record: Discharge from Draft, Leslie Neilson, November 11, 1918, Navajo County, Holbrook, Arizona.

1920 Census Maricopa County, Arizona, 14 Jan 1920

There are only three children at home. Hans shows no job.

Hans could never adjust to living in towns or working for a living. He farmed here and there and was a cowhand. He farmed in the Gila Valley, Middle Verde Valley,

freighted, and was a hired ranch hand and stockman. He spent most of his working years freighting and driving a 20 mule team. But as the spirit moved him, he would move on leaving his family to fend for themselves. Often leaving home on horseback saying, "I guess I'll go up to the Reservation and see how old Begay (a Navajo friend) is getting on," and he would be gone for months. He had been raised among the Navajos and couldn't adjust to the restrictions put upon him as a family man.

They must have been living in the Phoenix and Tempe area in 1919 as Leslie and Lucy had their first child, Lucile Neilson, 6 April 1919, in Tempe. See photo of family with Lucile as a baby. It looks like it was around 1920.

Aunt Ada Pearl Neilson Pinkleton Hemingway, in a letter to Dona dated 7-30-1992 (daughter): "Just a glimpse of my father and what he was like. Well, first I will say he was in every way a real pioneer cowboy. He could ride with the best of them, although, he was not a tall man. Yet I remember him as a handsome rider in his saddle. When we lived on a farm I can see him coming down the road, after he had been on a roundup. I would run out to meet him. I guess I was the apple of his eye. I was kinda puny as a child, but I outgrew it. I have pictures of him in his cowboy chaps. Horses and cattle were his livelihood for a number of years. But later he drove a mule team hauling ore from the Silaes (?) Mine to Silver City, Nevada, New Mexico. He had a good voice and knew many songs. Mostly cowboy songs or now a days you would call Western.

Many times he would keep us kids contented with his stories of little Elves, he would make up as he went along. It was kinda of a series. I am sure that everyone who knew my father liked him. Although it was his nature not to take life too seriously. For he always maintained a free spirit and just couldn't settle down and be a home man. But in his own way he loved my Mother, and had a charm that seemed to settle all differences. So summing it all up this will be a brief account of his life and the rest is in the Family Album."



Hans on his freighting wagon. Probably in Morenci

Middle Verde, Arizona

Stories told to Lucile Neilson Johnson, granddaughter, by James Hance Neilson, a son to Hans Peter Neilson, May 1981: "The Hans Peter Neilson family lived for many years as at what is now known as Middle Verde, between Bridgeport and Camp Verde. They were farming. Hans was a restless man and frequently without notice, would tell the family, "I think I'll go see how so and so (different Navajos on the Reservation) is doing," and off he'd go and stay as many days as he wished too. This was hard living for his wife and family. Jim worked hard as a very young man to help his mother keep body and soul together. Hans had been raised among the Navajo and couldn't adjust to the restrictions put upon him as a family man among the whites of his time. A great deal of the load fell upon Jim, as the oldest son of the family. Women were quite restricted in means to make a living at that time. Jim became an expert in many things during his lifetime as a result of having to assume so many responsibilities.

.....(Jim) tells of peddling watermelons to Prescott from Camp Verde. He rode horseback to Camp Verde two or three times a week from the farm, with produce.Their home on the Verde was not as complete a shelter as could be desirable. Jim tells that one time a skunk walked into the kitchen at night and stuck his head into an emptied tomato can. In the morning his Dad shot him in the kitchen and carried him out, head still in the can.

In 1910 Middle Verde has a population of 108 people.

Grandpa Hans was a true frontiersman. He was a cowboy, true to type of the early days of Arizona. He worked for the famous Hash Knife Ranch. He was a fast shot with a handgun. Jim tells that he had seen him ride fast around a pine tree firing shells into it. At one time, Jim remembers riding with his father in a Peter Sheler wagon going to White

River. Jim says his father suddenly pushed him down under the seat and said to stay low. His father was suddenly roped from two sides by Apaches. Just as suddenly Hans cut himself loose with a pocketknife and shot both Indians. They returned to Fort Apache. Jim was seven years old at the time. Hans and later Jim, also, freighted into Fort Apache and other places about 1899 and 1901. They drove four horses to a wagon.

Record from the county of Yavapai Superintendent of Schools, Prescott, Arizona:

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to certify that the school census records taken at Camp Verde School District No. 28, this county, under date of June 18, 1904, list Leslie Neilson, son of Hans Neilson, as being six (6) years of age at that time.

Sarah Folson, County School Superintendent



Han's freighting wagon and teams

Freighting

Times were different in Arizona in the 1880's. Most of the men who had teams and wagons made their living at freighting, because everything they couldn't raise in their gardens had to be bought at a Military Post, either at Fort Apache or White River, Arizona. Sometimes they had to go 240 miles into New Mexico, to Albuquerque, in order to buy flour. What crops they raised here were also used for trading. Cash was very scarce.

Oxen teams were frequently used. They would be hooked up to two heavily loaded wagons that made an outfit that would measure a hundred yards long. These oxen were great for pulling, but they were very slow in traveling, and it could take as many as

two weeks to make a trip to Albuquerque. At that time the grass in the country was plentiful, so there wasn't any need to carry grain to feed the animals in the summertime. While grazing during the night, the cattle would stray far away from camp and as morning came, it would find the men spread out trying to round them up so that they could be on their way. This was just one of those headaches that a pioneer had to put up with.

By the early 1900s times were changing. There were only a few oxen teams doing a little freighting, for by that time, the railroad brought in supplies. The sheep ranchers continued to ship their wool to Holbrook.

A story told by Les Neilson to daughter, Betty Lou Neilson Hightower. About his father Hans Peter Neilson.

"When Les was a small boy his father drove a six horse team freight wagon. They were going from Holbrook to Keams Canyon freighting for Fred Wetzler. There were five wagons that day. They started out Grandpa Neilson had a pinto horse he took with him. One day out they had just got started out. Les was riding along side his Dad on the wagon seat. Grandpa carried a 30-30 rifle and two pearl handle 45 colts. (Before they left Holbrook an Indian saw Grandpa's horse as they left.)

Grandpa asked Les, do you see any Indians on your side of the wagon. There were several Indians. They checked all the wagons looking for Grandpa's wagon with the pinto horse. They found the wagon they were looking for. The Indian saw Grandpa and threw rope over him. Grandpa had a sharp knife, quickly he cut the rope and grabbed his six shooters and shot at the Indians. He shot one and the rest rode off. The wagons stopped and Grandpa, Uncle Bud Smithson, and Faye Gardner decided to go on to Keam's Canyon, but the rest went back to Holbrook. They knew the Indian's at the Village would know about the killing.

Les had hid down in the wagon bed when Grandpa started to shoot. When the wagons arrived at Keams Canyon, the Indian Chief Billy Horsechese was there. Grandpa could speak Navajo, so he told Chief Billy about the Indian who wanted his horse, had done. So the Indian men made two lines and a club to each man. The man who did wrong was to run through this line. If he lived he was free. He was buried a little way from the Indian Camp. This was the Navajo way of punishment."

Obituary

"Arizona Republic", Wednesday, Jan 13, 1932: Hans Peter Neilson, Denmark immigrant, who in the 56 years of his Arizona life was a cowman, range fighter, Indian dialect expert and horseman, will be buried with the prayers of the Mormon faith in the Mesa cemetery today.

.....Mr. Neilson when 7 years old rode his own pony into Arizona in 1876, a runaway fugitive from the home of his guardian in Utah. Four and one-half years before he had left his birthplace, Copenhagen, to cross the Atlantic ocean under the care of a Mormon Elder.

He crossed the Colorado river at Lee's Ferry in a rowboat and lived for many years at the ferry community. From this point he roamed the Navajo and Apache Indian reservations with such frequency that he learned to speak the tribal language of both. He

also knew much of the Ute language and mastered the nominative terms of a now extinct tribe that once lived in the neighborhood of Lee's Ferry.

As a cowman, his range life took him south and east to the rich country of St. Johns and Tonto basin. In the Tonto basin war he fought with the cattlemen. He carried a bullet-scarred hip from this feud. He took part in the Greer War and rode with cowboys into St. Johns the day the cattlemen drove Mexican sheepherders from its borders. In this fight he was thrown to the ground when his horse was shot.

Mr. Neilson carried two other scars from range fights. One was from range fights. One was a shin wound, the result of a skirmish between cowmen and sheep man on his ranch. The other was from a knife wound in the left shoulder, put there by a Mexican laborer in Show Low, Arizona."

Death Certificate

Death in Phoenix, Maricopa, Arizona. Living with son (Leslie) 1011 Grand Ave., Phoenix, Arizona. Widower, White, Male, 73 years old, soldier; father: Henry Neilson, who was from Denmark; Mother, unknown, from Denmark; informant-family; died of bronchial pneumonia and senility, buried in Mesa, Arizona. No headstone marks his grave. (note Dona: not all correct information.)

Jen and Elsie Marie's children

At the end of this short history I thought it would be of interest to include information about his father and mother and siblings who never were a part of his life once he was shipped off to American. He was left on his own and thus developed a very different life than theirs. The descendents of his sibling have told us that when he did go up to see them in Utah they hated to see him come as he came up to "Mooch" off of them.

As to his name change from "Sorensen" to "Neilson", it still remains somewhat of mystery, but I can give my own opinion. His father's last name was "Nielsen" on the Danish official records. On the LDS Church records it always shows up as "Sorensen". Most of his siblings changed their last name to "Nielsen" from "Sorensen" legally. I believe that Grandma Evelyn was tired of using both names and told Hans Peter to keep it one way or the other. He chose "Neilson" which is close to the real thing. Maybe he didn't know how to spell it or he just wasn't excited about continuing that name. So they dropped the "Sorensen" altogether. Another thought has crossed my mind. He was pretty much wild when he was in his teens and early twenties. He may have changed his name to protect himself from any trouble he had been in before he got married and wanted a clean start. I'm leaning towards great grandmother telling him to chose a name and stick with it as he was using both.

His family in Utah emigrated by 1888. They had lost all contact with Hans Peter and they thought that he was probably dead and even named another child Hans Peter. As was the custom when one child died you gave the next the same name. Thus they had a "Big Hans and a Little Hans" It would be interesting to hear how they connected back up and at what point. There are Church records that show he took his wife and two young children to Utah around 1893. Removed themselves it says. Maybe he hoped to make a go of it up in Utah with them. It didn't work out and they moved back to Arizona.

The Utah family settled mainly in Cleveland, Emery County, Utah. They worked

in Iron County and some settled in Spanish Fork. For a while the family was living and attending church in Benjamin, Utah. Joseph, their son and family lived in Benjamin for a while and they probably were near or with them. These were poor people and moved around where the work was or where children moved. Several worked in Scofield, Iron, Utah, a small mining town. Joseph worked there for some time and decided he didn't want to raise his family in a mining town and moved to Spanish Fork. A little town called Elmo, Emery, Utah is where Elsie died. It'd be interesting to know who she was with when she died. A distant cousin doing research on Jens and Elsie Marie said they couldn't afford to pay property taxes and moved many times just in the town of Spanish Fork, Utah.

Here is a simple history of his family. The children of Jens and Elsie were not christened in Denmark as they were LDS at the time. Most were blessed and given a name in the Danish Branch.

Jens and Elsie are both buried in Cleveland, Emery, Utah.

1st child: Soren Nielsen died as an infant in Denmark.

2nd child: Soren Peter Nielsen married Petrea Knudsen. They had two children. Soren died in 1893.

3rd child: Andrew Peter married Minnie Jacobsen. Lived in Cleveland, Emery, UT where most of his children were born. He died 23 July 1943, Ogden, UT.

4th child: Hans Peter our great-grandfather. Known as "Little Hans".

5th child: Anne Katrine married Henry Nielsen. They lived in Spanish Fork.

6th child: Maren Nielsen married John Christian Hansen.

7th child: Joseph S. Sorensen: Kept the Sorensen name, Married Sarah Leyshon. Went to fight in the Spanish American War and the Filipino insurrection. Lived in Compton, CA and Benjamin, UT.

8th child: Hans Peter Sorensen, known as "Big Hans", died on a street in California. Went to the Spanish American War with his brother Joseph. They enlisted at Castle Gate, Utah. They also served in the Filipino insurrection.

9th child: Niels Sorensen, married Rachel Madsen. Lived in Cleveland, Utah. He worked in mining and farming in Cleveland. Died in Provo in a convalescent home after a lingering illness. Niece and nephews cared for him and took care of his burial.

10th child: Jensine Ingeline, called Lena, died in Washington.

Children of Hans and Mary Evelyn Neilson



James Hance Neilson



Sarah Evelyn Neilson



Bertha Uphemia Neilson



Leslie Thomas Neilson and Lucy



Albert Barton Neilson



Ada Pearl Neilson and Dean Pingleton



Archie Leroy Neilson